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TAGS: PREL PHUM MARR SU CD IV RW CT UV FR
SUBJECT: FRANCE/AFRICA: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR DISCUSSES KEY
ISSUES

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt,
.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Presidential AF Advisor Romain Serman on December 17 reported on key France-Africa issues, some resulting from meetings at the December 8-9 Lisbon EU-Africa Summit:

-- Rwanda: Presidents Sarkozy and Kagame agreed to work to normalize relations and to maintain personal supervision of this project;

-- Sudan: Sarkozy pressed President Bashir to expedite UNAMID's deployment and distanced France from Darfur rebel leader Abdulwahid el-Nur, who may have to leave France after December 28, when his current residency visa expires;

-- Cote d'Ivoire: Sarkozy told President Gbagbo that France wanted a reliable voters list, no further backsiding on the date for elections, and free, fair, and transparent elections;

-- Djibouti: Sarkozy and President Guelleh agreed to improve relations irrespective of the Borrel Case, with Sarkozy explaining that the GOF could do little to limit the independence of the judges investigating Borrel's death;

-- Chad/C.A.R.: The lack of helicopters continues to be the main impediment to deploying EUFOR in support of MINURCAT, with France in discussion with Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria on furnishing the aircraft and with EU partners, particularly the UK, on financing them;

-- Sarkozy plans to visit Chad, Angola, and South Africa in February 2008, with a speech in South Africa setting forth France's policy goals towards Africa.

END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Romain Serman, one of the AF Advisors at the French presidency, on December 17 provided an overview of AF-related issues, beginning with the December 8-9 EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, which Serman attended. He said that Sarkozy's December 8 speech was generally well received, especially by Europeans who welcomed Sarkozy's frank messages to both Europeans and Africans on the need to develop relations on a pragmatic basis free of the trappings of the past. (NOTE: Text of the speech in French is available at www.elysee.fr or from kanedarj@state.gov. END NOTE.) Sarkozy held nine bilateral meetings with African leaders.

Rwanda

¶3. (C) Serman said that the Sarkozy-Kagame meeting was a good one, with both sides agreeing to work to normalize relations, which were severed by Rwanda in November 2006 following the issuance of then-Judge Bruguiere's report that in effect accused several leading Rwandans, including Kagame, of involvement in events leading to the 1994 genocide. The two presidents met one-on-one for about 10 minutes. They agreed that their respective Foreign Ministers would work together to establish a road-map on how to move relations forward but that the two presidents would oversee this work closely. Serman said that there was no timetable in place as to when relations might eventually be normalized.

¶4. (C) Serman commented that it was important that Sarkozy and Kagame developed a bit of personal rapport in Lisbon. This was facilitated by a part of Sarkozy's speech in which he said "we have not always been able to foresee or stop dramas that lack a name. I am thinking of Rwanda and its genocide, which makes us, France included, reflect on our weaknesses and our errors." Serman said that this was the farthest any French leader had gone in expressing regret about France's connection to the genocide, a position that Serman (PROTECT) said some in the French military opposed when the speech was being vetted.

Sudan/Darfur

¶5. (C) Bashir asked to meet with Sarkozy, and the French "couldn't say 'no,'" Serman reported. Sarkozy told Bashir that he did not "have anything against you personally," with both sides noting the generally positive historical relations between France and Sudan. That said, Sarkozy told Bashir bluntly that the Darfur problem had to be resolved and that the international community could not accept continuation of

the massacres. He also said that Bashir should not veto participation by non-Africans, such as the Nordics or Thailand, who wanted to help. According to Serman, Bashir hemmed and hawed, saying that he would "reconsider" some of his policies but also stating that UNAMID should be composed of African troops or "Asians who are Muslim." Sarkozy pointed out that Europeans never complained about the presence of Africans in, for example, Kosovo and Haiti, even those were not "African" problems. Sudan should be open to anyone willing to help. Sarkozy said that Sudan should also stop trying to exploit the "Arche de Zoe" case for its own ends (the case involving the French NGO that attempted to take some 100 children from Chad to France, with some of the children allegedly of Sudanese origin).

¶6. (C) Darfur rebel leader Abdulwahid el-Nur, currently residing in France, was also a subject of discussion. Bashir claimed that France was implicitly favoring the rebels by allowing Abdulwahid to stay in France. Sarkozy said that this was not the case and that Abdulwahid's continued failure to participate in peace talks could lead to his being expelled from France after December 28, when his current visa expires. Serman said that Sarkozy was partially successful in disabusing Bashir of the notion that France supported Abdulwahid.

¶7. (C) Serman said that France was indeed prepared to let Abdulwahid's visa expire, thus forcing him to seek residency elsewhere. He said that the GOF was tired of his refusal to participate. The French were asking Senegal, which had expressed interest in hosting him, to accept him should he have to leave France. As he holds an Eritrean passport, Eritrea might be another eventual destination. France could not cancel his visa prior to December 28 without a UNSC resolution sanctioning him or unless he became a "threat to public order."

¶8. (C) Serman said that, in a transparent move to stave off the expiration of his visa, Abdulwahid had had his wife and two children request French visas in Nairobi (where they reside) to allow them to visit France over the year-end holiday season (i.e., just when his visa is to expire on December 28). "He thinks we could not order him to leave

when his wife and children will have just arrived," Serman said. However, Serman said that the French had denied the application for visas for Abdulwahid's wife and children. All of this could change, he said, if Abdulwahid joined the peace talks, but Serman said that that did not seem likely.

Cote d'Ivoire

¶19. (C) In Lisbon, Sarkozy met with Burkina Faso President Compaore, Cote d'Ivoire President Gbagbo, and with the two of them together. He stressed France's support of the Ouagadougou Peace Accords. Serman said that one reason Sarkozy met with Gbagbo was to disallow Gbagbo from insinuating that Sarkozy did not like Gbagbo or was afraid of him, an idea Gbagbo has used in his attempts to manipulate France's image in Cote d'Ivoire. Sarkozy wanted to dispel the notion that he or the GOF was reluctant to deal with Gbagbo. That, Serman said, is no longer an issue after their meeting.

¶10. (C) Sarkozy made three points with Gbagbo -- (1) the Cote d'Ivoire had to develop a credible list of eligible voters; (2) there should be no further tinkering with the elections calendar or yet another postponement; and (3) the elections themselves had to be free and fair. Serman said that Gbagbo tried to point out that African elections were often "irregular," stating (in Compaore's presence) that even those in Burkina Faso had not been completely problem-free. Compaore did not appreciate this remark, the substance of which he denied, and Sarkozy observed Compaore and Gbagbo disputing the merits of Burkina Faso's elections and its electoral system.

Djibouti

¶11. (C) Sarkozy met with Djibouti President Guelleh in Paris, during the latter's visit following the Lisbon Summit. Serman said that the meeting was friendly and cordial and the two presidents seemed to have developed good personal rapport. Both sides agreed to promote improved relations. Concerning the Borrel Affair (the case of the French magistrate who died in Djibouti in 1995 and whose death led to complex series of court cases involving accusations of

Djiboutian government complicity), Serman said that Sarkozy explained to Guelleh the independent nature of the French judiciary. Most importantly, Sarkozy seemed to have convinced Guelleh that the French government was not using these court cases to try to "get" Guelleh or his associates. To the contrary, the French government was interested in promoting good relations and avoiding having the Borrel case become the sole determinant of the relationship. Guelleh seemed to appreciate Sarkozy's explanations.

¶12. (C) Guelleh reportedly expressed concern about the French military presence in Djibouti, wondering if France might withdraw its forces (which he did not want to see happen) because of the U.S. military presence there. Sarkozy said that such was not the case and the French and U.S. presences complemented each other. He said that France had not intention of altering its basing arrangement in Djibouti.

Sarkozy said that France would increase its development programs in Djibouti, including work on such things as improving Djibouti's port.

Chad/C.A.R.

¶13. (C) Serman said, glumly, that the EU operation for Chad and C.A.R. remained a problem, with the principal obstacle being the lack of helicopters. France had been talking to Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria, which seemed interested in furnishing the helicopters but would need financing. Serman said that France would continue lobbying European partners, particularly the UK, in an effort to secure an EU-wide commitment to fund the helicopters. He said that EUFOR would need at least a dozen, and no more than 20 helicopters, each costing about USD 2 million per year to operate. This was a relatively small sum. He said that he was optimistic that a

solution would be found, but he refrained from saying whether one was imminent. Serman noted that the EU would lose considerable face if it failed to fund the mission after having taken the political decision to form and deploy it.

¶14. (C) Serman said that it appeared that a small number of transport aircraft would be furnished by Spain and/or Portugal. Asked whether France would fund the helicopters if all else failed, Serman said that France was not inclined to do so -- "This is supposed to be an EU mission and we are already committed to paying for much of it and have already committed the bulk of the troops. It is a matter of principle -- the other EU partners should contribute as well." He added that France's financing the helicopters would also increase the perception that the operation was "French," an impression the French wanted to avoid giving.

Looking Ahead

¶15. (C) Serman said that Sarkozy's trip to Africa in February 2008 was still on track, with visits to Chad, Angola, and South Africa on the agenda. In Chad, Sarkozy would hope to be able to observe the EUFOR/MINURCAT deployment at first hand. In Angola, he expects to further the effort on the part of both France and Angola to improve relations, which have been in deep-freeze because of the Falcone Affair (an complicated arms dealing scheme dating back to the Mitterrand and Chirac eras). In South Africa, Sarkozy plans to make a speech before the South African Parliament that will build on his July 26 speech in Dakar and the December 8 speech in Lisbon and set forth his vision for France's evolving policy vis-a-vis Africa.

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